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National Pedagogic Congress of Spain

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NATIONAL PEDAGOGIC CONGRESS OF SPAIN.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
BUREAU OF EDUCATION,
Washington, D. C., August 16, 1882.

The improvement of man's condition by the education of the young under the direction of civil administrations is becoming the recognized method of assured progress the world over.

The teachers of the United States will be interested in this summary of the proceedings of the meeting of the Spanish teachers, at which their chief ruler presided and spoke words of encouragement.

Special attention is invited to the effort to bring together the teachers and the working people, whose capital is their skill at handicraft, which so specially depends upon the intelligence and character to be acquired by education and training. The teacher is the friend of all the people and their agent for good.

JOHN EATON,
Commissioner.

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NATIONAL PEDAGOGIC CONGRESS OF SPAIN.

On the 28th of last May the National Pedagogic Congress of Spain met at Madrid in the Central University. King Alphonso and the entire foreign diplomatic corps were present. General Ros de Olano presided, and there was an attendance of 827 male and 205 female teachers.

This was the first meeting of the congress, and many addresses were made, the first of which was delivered by Don Pedro de Alcantara Garcia, secretary of the congress. After calling attention to the importance which all nations now attach to the development and improvement of primary instruction, he proceeded to enumerate various pedagogic congresses which have been held from time to time since 1848 at Hamburg, Dresden, Hanover, and Frankfort, in Switzerland, Belgium, Austria, Italy, France, England, and Russia, and even in Mexico, and the different attempts in the same direction made in Spain in 1870, 1876, and 1881. None of these latter, however, had the importance of the present congress.

The idea of this congress arose in the Madrid society El Fomento de las Artes, composed in great part of artisans. The president of this society, Señor Don Modesto Fernandez y Gonzalez, believing that a closer union ought to exist between education and labor, conceived the idea of bringing together the givers and the receivers of knowledge—the teachers and the workers—and so render the former more capable of being useful to the latter. To this end he thought it expedient to bring the teachers in a body in contact with the artisans, so as to find out their wishes and needs and to discuss together their theories about methods of teaching. From the coöperation of both parties there will result indirectly improvements in school appliances, in methods of instruction, and in the condition of the teachers themselves. The attention of the Spanish Government cannot fail to be drawn to the action of this congress.

After the address of the secretary, Don José Garcia y Garcia explained the object of the society El Fomento de las Artes, how the idea of holding the congress occurred to it, and what it expected the congress to do. In his opinion, it is the office of such an assembly to find some way of solving the great problem of the education of children and the real diffusion of instruction—not by relying upon the state to take the initiative exclusively, but by looking to the union and coöperation of individuals, which, at the present day, form the indispensable basis of all reform in Spain. He hoped that it would be decided to compel scholars to attend school until their fourteenth year, at which age they are able to learn and remember the things they have to know when they enter the workshop as artisans. He also hoped that something would be done towards diminishing the number of scholars in classes, while increasing the number of schools, and in reference to the treatment of teachers and the dignity of their position.

The Marquis de Guad-el-Jelu, Señor Don Antonio Ros de Olano, made some remarks in praise of those who have devoted themselves to the instruction of the Spanish people and by whose efforts primary education in Spain has been raised to its present condition. He then addressed the female teachers, and, reminding them of the delicate duties which fall to their share in the instruction of young girls, urged them to do all in their power, while training the intellects of their pupils, to awaken and cultivate in their minds such sentiments and ideas as would help to form in them in after

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years desirable characters as women. It is to these you country must look in the future for its men of learning an its soldiers.

The King then spoke as follows:

GENTLEMEN: Courtesy compels me to address you, not only in order to express my gratitude to the president and secretary of the congress and the representative of the Fomento de las Artes for the friendly things they have said to me and the importance they have attributed to my concurrence in this interesting affair, but also that I may testify the satisfaction I feel at having the honor to preside at this first pedagogic congress.

Only a few days ago the congress of hygienists met in this hall, for the purpose of instituting a society having in view the improvement of the material condition of the Spanish people. To-day the representatives of the educating class, which more than any other has it in its power to contribute to the development of the national intelligence, instruction, and culture, have met here for the same purpose. Is not this an evidence, gentlemen, that these two ideas, which are complementary of each other, that these two currents, which flow from the duality of human nature, are the two motors which urge our country slowly but surely onward in the path of civilization and progress? How can I add anything to what you have heard from those who have just preceded me? They have shown you clearly how great and noble is the mission of the teacher, for he draws man out of that state of ignorance which makes him resemble a being deprived of reason and opens his heart and eyes to the grand ideas which form the foundation of all society: God, country, family, and charity.

It is, therefore, my duty to express in this hall not only the interest I feel in the lot of the Spanish teacher, but also my sincere desire to contribute in such manner as my duties and prerogatives may permit to an amelioration of his condition, in which effort the government will assist me with an interest equal to my own. I was once a schoolboy, and I feel a deep sense of gratitude to my own beloved teachers, and God knows that if it depended on me alone Spanish teachers would have no cause to envy their fellows in the most advanced countries of Europe.

But Señor Garcia y Garcia, the representative of the Fomento de las Artes, has well said that the time has passed when it was believed that an initiative on the part of the state would accomplish everything. Neither is it any longer just that the state should bear all the responsibility. The King and the government can help, encourage, direct, and regulate the progress of instruction, but its inception lies in the currents of public opinion, which are so powerful that nothing else can take their place. As I have already said in this hall, ignorance is the worst form of slavery, and only those redeem themselves from it who yearn to be rid of it and who know how to render themselves worthy of obtaining and preserving such freedom.

This speech was frequently interrupted by heartfelt applause. The congress was declared open, and the first session adjourned.

The next day the following questions were discussed: What should be the organization and the general conditions of public education? Should such education be gratuitous or paid for, obligatory or voluntary? What dispositions and means should be taken to diffuse education among the people and increase the attendance of scholars at primary schools?

This second session closed with an incident which shows that much gratitude is felt in Spain to those who are occupied with popular instruction and which must have been very flattering to the gentleman most prominently concerned. When Señor Moyano entered the hall, Señor Don Modesto Fernandez y Gonzalez arose and, greeting him as the illustrious author of the existing law on public instruction, reviewed at some length his services while at the head of the ministry of the Fomento. After these remarks, which were received with hearty applause, all the members of the congress rose to their feet and unanimously elected Señor Moyano honorary president of the congress by acclamation.

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